

Union Square Civic Advisory Committee
Meeting Notes 3/5/14

Master Developer Presentations

I. Introduction

Wig Zamore, chairman of the CAC, welcomes and opens the discussion for public comment.

II. Public Comment Period

- a. Local resident expresses concern over residential tax increases; is interested in learning how commercial development will lessen pressure on residential taxes.

III. Meeting Format

Edward O'Donnell, Director of Economic Development, provides the meeting schedule for all master developer presentations. The next two meetings will be Tuesday, March 11 and Tuesday, March 18. Both will be held from 6-8 PM at the Argenziano School. Development teams will also present to the Somerville Redevelopment Authority. Those meetings will be held 3/10, 3/11 and 3/13 from 4-6 PM. All meetings will be videotaped.

IV. Presentation by Trinity/Davis

- Team has already worked together on several projects, including currently in Stamford
- Trinity:
 - Approach is to work with community members, local officials in order to reflect the community's vision.
 - Adept at utilizing private debt/equity, combining these resources with public resources to finance large projects
 - Housing: track record of building diverse housing options, from high end to homeless units while ensuring that the entire development is in harmony
 - Build retail that activates streets; retail opportunities for companies other than national chains. Interested in financing project in a way that creates opportunities for independent retailers.
- Davis Companies:
 - Experience in biotech, lab space, commercial and retail development.
 - Headquartered in Boston; most development has occurred within the region.
 - 1/3 of their buildings are LEED certified
 - Have a discretionary real estate fund worth \$413M; can invest directly into project
- ICON:
 - Women-owned business; have worked in Somerville over the past decade including Maxwell's Green and police station
 - Consider themselves to be good neighbors and collaborators; want to build *great* places
 - Have a lot of experience with transit-oriented development, including projects over the Green Line and beside the Orange Line; experience working with MassDOT and federal highway authority
- Projects include:

- West End revitalization directly across from the Garden (Avenir); sits atop of N. Station and includes 241 units, retail. This is the “ultimate” TOD project where the T entrance is actually within the building; example of neighborhood infill. Parking ratio of 0.5/unit.
- One Canal: Another housing, mixed-use project by North Station
- Charles River Plaza: Next to MGH; acquired a building with underperforming retail and offices; created a vision that included office, medical and lab space that had reprogrammed retail that fit the needs of the area, including a Bank of America, Whole Foods and pharmacy. Attracted Partners Healthcare as anchor tenant. This project was complicated and involved a land swap with the city; understood everyone’s interests and was able to create the best design to reflect same
- Hamilton Canal, Lowell: there was already a great deal of brick and mortar development but required heavy utility and infrastructure investment around old mills, canals. The team held a year-long community charette process that helped to identify what was special and important to neighbors. Laid out the criteria of development as a part of a form-based code. Included artist housing (130 units), active courtyards, adaptive reuse of 160k square feet of manufacturing building into new offices. Their \$1.5 million in infrastructure improvements centered around the trolley extension.
- Envision USQ as a rich, diverse community (“wordle” in the spirit of SomerVision)
- Q&A: How do they plan to support local retailers? The national chains mentioned as part of Charles River Plaza were a result of the downtown location; in USQ they plan to build space for incubators, small local retailers and artists. Team has experience leveraging tax credits to subsidize smaller businesses vs. anchor tenants. (Follow up Q: What happens when tax credits dry up?) Though federal tax credit programs are evolving, they likely will continue in some form. Moreover, the team would look to build market rate housing that balances affordable housing.

V. Presentation by KSS/Redgate

- Plan to build on the unique flavor and success of USQ
- Over 10M sq. ft. of mixed-use development
- Experience with Master Planning: Fan Pier, San Juan
- Involved in projects including North Point, Maxwell’s Green, Fort Point, Fan Pier
- Creating places for people; incremental phasing is important in order to protect – but amplify – existing ecosystem.
- Ground floor of buildings must reflect the soul of the community
- Opportunity because of transportation; integrate into development and consider how it affects public movement overall
- Experience in public planning that produces public benefit (e.g. open space); have held mind-mixers and other collaborative events on site to gain community input
- Focus on community building (the public realm is most important → focus on ground floor; building program above will follow suit)
- Look at USQ as a network of nodes that come together; must be cohesive.
- Have never worked on a plan that hasn’t been implemented. They can do a project of this size.

VI. Presentation by HYM Investments

- Tim O’Brien, Managing Director, has experience in both the public and private sector. Former director of the BRA in the 1990s; understands the community process and how to empower the public while still moving projects forward.

- Values and Experience: dedicated to community process; understand and manage preservation/change; enhance communities with commercial, retail and residential.
 - Proven ability to effectively manage complex projects that have many moving parts.
 - Experience with GLX and working with MBTA
 - Commitment to open space, and willing to look outside the box in order to make that happen. For instance, could an entire parcel serve as one large park?
- Projects:
 - North Point: On the Somerville border; experience working with Somerville permitting. Initially, the projects proposed for the site had all been housing. Project required a swap with Cambridge to allow housing to be built on Cambridge side and commercial/office space on the Somerville side. Reflection of community/city needs. Also understand that what's allowed in zoning isn't necessarily what the community wants.
 - Government Center Garage: focus of this project was neighborhood connectivity, including connecting Beacon Hill to North End. Project is mixed-use with retail on ground floor. Spent four years refining the project and the final result created something special for the community that nobody on City Council opposed.
- In USQ, they'll listen—won't proscribe what's best for the community. A strong focus on placemaking: too often, developers focus on buildings and not the places *between* the buildings, which is where civic life truly takes place.

VII. Open Q&A for all development teams

- *What's your biggest challenge?*
 - HYM: The city wants commercial, office and lab space built first, but right now the market is pushing for housing. Businesses are making location decisions based upon where their employees want to live; housing costs matter.
 - Redgate: The completion of infrastructure and other large projects (e.g. MBTA station) are largely out of the MD's control. The sewer, transit and public park improvements need to be made within a certain timeframe.
 - Trinity: Acknowledging that much planning has already taken place, there is still a wide difference in opinion as to what USQ should become. It will be a challenge to build consensus around what works for everyone. Need to find a balance between large institutions, independent retailers and affordable space for residents.

VIII. Closing

Edward O'Donnell explains that these materials will be made available online at:

<http://www.somervillema.gov/departments/ospcd/economic-development/union-square-redevelopment>